

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

091019Z Jun 06

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000785

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/PPD-MKULLA, CTEAL

E.O. 12958; N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: ARMENIA'S NEW (OLD) MINISTER OF EDUCATION

REF: YEREVAN 691

Summary

-----  
[1](#)1. Summary: On June 5, Ambassador, DCM and CAO met with newly appointed Minister of Education Levon Mkrtchyan, who took up his post when the party of Parliament Speaker Baghdassarian left the ruling coalition in early May. Mkrtchyan made a strong first impression, with a firm command of the challenges of reforming the Armenian primary and secondary education sectors. He also displayed a well-studied and detailed command of USG education assistance programs. The education sector is one of Armenia's most corrupt and resistant to change, a fact that Mkrtchyan's predecessor was unable (or unwilling) to address. Mkrtchyan should be a strong partner for reform in the relatively brief period before elections in 2007. End Summary.

-----  
Minister Laments Missed Opportunities  
-----

[1](#)2. Minister Mkrtchyan minced no words in expressing his displeasure with the slow and sloppy progress of the World Bank Track II Education Program. He detailed the program's woes: multiple missed deadlines, improper bidding, and small divided tenders that were of interest only to small local companies, rather than one large tender that would be of interest to international organizations with greater experience in IT education projects. He specifically mentioned that the recent USD \$1.2 million tender was, "to put it mildly," not properly competed. This parallels what Post had heard from two separate international NGOs that originally bid on the project, only to later pull out due to bidding irregularities. Minister Mkrtchyan stated that although he is "stuck" with these results, he recently notified World Bank of his concerns and vows to personally oversee the fall 2006 follow-on bid.

-----  
CHANGE MANAGEMENT: PR TO THE PARENTS  
-----

[1](#)3. Minister Mkrtchyan identified his biggest task as "public relations to the parents," noting public resistance to Armenia's move from a ten-year to a twelve year primary school system. In a recent RFE/RL article one teacher stated, "I am against 11-year and 12-year instruction, the previous system was much better." This teacher echoes the overwhelmingly negative public sentiment Minister Mkrtchyan faces; however, he believes public opinion can be moved if the government clearly and repeatedly explains to parents, teachers and administrators that the Soviet education system is no longer relevant; and, that Armenia must look to integrate into the European education system. Minister Mkrtchyan was frustrated that his predecessor used all of the funds allocated for PR in the World Bank facility for a one-shot television promotion which had little effect. He said that following his personal talks with various Parliament members, the Parliament plans on holding a debate within the next month on education reform issues.

-----  
THE CREDIT AND TRANSFER SYSTEM  
-----

[1](#)4. Armenia signed a Communique joining the Bologna Process in May 2005, thus committing to develop the Armenian education system towards the European Higher Education Area standards by 2010. One of the main requirements of this Process is to move Armenian universities to a credit-based system. Presently only one university - The American University of Armenia (AUA) - uses this system. Minister Mkrtchyan plans to use the experience of AUA's credit and accreditation process, coupled with assistance from Germany, as a model. Believing that Germany's experience in integrating the East German education system into the West German system will provide useful insights, Mkrtchyan plans to travel to Germany in November for high-level meetings.

-----  
USG PROGRAMS  
-----

15. Minister Mkrtchyan showed his familiarity with USG education sector assistance programs and expressed his sincere appreciation to the USG for our sustained focus in this area. Less than three weeks into his third appointment as Minister (see reftel), Minister Mkrtchyan met with Armenian teachers who have been trained in new teaching methodologies via the USG-funded, IREX-implemented teacher training programs. As a result of this meeting, Minister Mkrtchyan has decided to create a Ministry of Education "professional board" comprised of teachers, administrators and students who are alumni of international exchange training programs.

16. Ambassador Evans highlighted Post's concerns regarding the transfer of the USD \$12 million Armenian School Connectivity Program (ASCP), which is scheduled to move from USG-funded implementer Project Harmony to the GOAM-funded National Center for Education Technologies center in July 2007. Minister Mkrtchyan was aware of the slow progress and promised to shore up the GOAM financing and human capital needed to make the 2007 transfer successful.

EVANS